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## Press Release

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### **U.S. asthma rates continue to rise**

*CDC and partners reinforce World Asthma Day's message take control of your asthma*

People diagnosed with asthma in the United States grew by 4.3 million between 2001 and 2009, according to a new [Vital Signs](#) report released today by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). In 2009, nearly 1 in 12 Americans were diagnosed with asthma. In addition to increased diagnoses, asthma costs grew from about \$53 billion in 2002 to about \$56 billion in 2007, about a 6 percent increase. The explanation for the growth in asthma rates is unknown.

Asthma is a lifelong disease that causes wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing, though people with asthma can control symptoms and prevent asthma attacks by avoiding things that can set off an asthma attacks, and correctly using prescribed medicine, like inhaled corticosteroids. The report highlights the benefits of essential asthma education and services that reduce the impact of these triggers, but most often these benefits are not covered by health insurers.

“Despite the fact that outdoor air quality has improved, we’ve reduced two common asthma triggers – secondhand smoke and smoking in general — asthma is increasing,” said Paul Garbe, D.V.M., M.P.H, chief of CDC’s Air Pollution and Respiratory Health Branch. “While we don’t know the cause of the increase, our top priority is getting people to manage their symptoms better.”

Asthma triggers are usually environmental and can be found at school, work, home, outdoors, and elsewhere and can include tobacco smoke, mold, outdoor air pollution, and infections linked to influenza, cold-like symptoms, and other viruses.

Asthma diagnoses increased among all demographic groups between 2001 and 2009, though a higher percentage of children reported having asthma than adults (9.6 percent compared to 7.7 percent in 2009), Diagnoses were especially high among boys (11.3 percent). The greatest rise in asthma rates was among black children (almost a 50 percent increase) from 2001 through 2009. Seventeen percent of non-Hispanic black children had asthma in 2009, the highest rate among racial/ethnic groups.

Annual asthma costs in the United States were \$3,300 per person with asthma from 2002 to 2007 in medical expenses. About 2 in 5 uninsured and 1 in 9 insured people with asthma could not afford their prescription medication.



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“Asthma is a serious, lifelong disease that unfortunately kills thousands of people each year and adds billions to our nation’s health care costs,” said CDC Director [Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.](#) “We have to do a better job educating people about managing their symptoms and how to correctly use medicines to control asthma so they can live longer more productive lives while saving health care costs.”

This report coincides with [World Asthma Day](#), an annual event sponsored by the [Global Initiative for Asthma](#). This year’s theme is “You Can Control Your Asthma.” Reducing asthma attacks and the human and economic costs of asthma are key priorities for the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) and the focus of a collaborative effort involving many parts of HHS. In support of this effort CDC recommends:

- Improving indoor air quality for people with asthma through measures such as smoke-free air laws and policies, healthy schools and workplaces.
- Teach patients how to avoid asthma triggers such as tobacco smoke, mold, pet dander, and outdoor air pollution,
- Encouraging clinicians to prescribe inhaled corticosteroids for all patients with persistent asthma and to use a written asthma action plan to teach patients how manage their symptoms.
- Promoting measures that prevent asthma attacks such as increasing access to corticosteroids and other prescribed medicines.
- Encourage home environmental assessments and educational sessions conducted by clinicians, health educators, and other health professionals both within and outside of the clinical setting.

### **About Vital Signs**

CDC Vital Signs is a report that appears on the first Tuesday of the month as part of the CDC journal [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report \(MMWR\)](#). Vital Signs is designed to provide the latest data and information on key health indicators — cancer prevention, obesity, tobacco use, alcohol use, access to health care, HIV/AIDS, motor vehicle passenger safety, health care-associated infections, cardiovascular health, teen pregnancy, asthma, and food safety.

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